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ABSTRACT

Restructuring has come to mean fundamentally substantive change leading to improvement in students' education, while offering the promise of power sharing. Organizational, curricular, relational, and fiscal changes were part of the restructuring initiatives of four urban districts. Unfortunately, the efforts generally fell short of genuine power-sharing. The Education Development Center, Inc. analyzed district changes on behalf of the Teacher Networks Group. In one district, the key initiatives were decentralization and site-based management, but there was no consensus about what these terms meant. In the second district, educators had not attended to curricular or relational changes. Site-based management with shared decision-making was appealing, but there was no agreement on what site-based management and shared decision-making meant. In the third district, budget cutbacks resulted in involuntary decentralization. Voluntary teacher study groups created positive relational changes, without obvious curricular changes. In the last district, fiscal changes made state funding attractive. But the funds were contingent on the forming of governance plans, which some saw as a distraction from the improvement of learning. If restructuring is about sharing power, all four types of change may be needed, as well as a clear connection between the improvement of learning and school restructuring. (RKJ)

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Views from Four School Districts

Barbara Miller

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What Is Really Changing When Schools Restructure?

Views from Four School Districts

Barbara Miller

Restructuring takes various forms in school districts across the country. This paper describes four kinds of changes — organizational, curricular, relational, and fiscal — that are undertaken in the name of reform, and illustrates these changes in the restructuring initiatives of four urban school districts. Analysis of these districts' efforts show that while the intention is to create substantive change in schools, the efforts generally fall short of the promise of genuine power sharing within schools and districts.

In this latest wave of educational reform, the term "restructuring" has come to mean many things. It is fundamentally about substantive change within schools and districts, with the expectation that these changes will lead to improvement in students' education. As such, school restructuring is part of a long historical line of educational initiatives. What is common to the many efforts that fall under the restructuring rubric, and what makes them particularly attractive to those within school systems, is that they hold out the promise of some kind of power sharing, a change in the political status quo in schools.

There are many ways to categorize the kinds of changes wrought in the name of restructuring. In this paper I focus on four kinds of restructuring changes: organizational, curricular, fiscal, and relational. My purpose is to show how these restructuring changes are enacted in school and district practices, in ways in which these efforts often fall short of the promise of genuine power sharing implicit in school restructuring. While the kinds of restructuring changes seen in these urban districts are diverse, the success of these efforts depends on developing new skills, knowledge, and roles for teachers, administrators, and district staff.

In this paper I present case studies of restructuring efforts in four urban school districts, sites researched as part of a study of staff development for teachers, carried out at Education Development Center, Inc., by me and my colleagues Brian Lord and Judy Dorney. The study was carried out on behalf of the Teacher Networks Group, a collection of networks and their funders committed to more collegial kinds of professional development for teachers.[1] This group commissioned the research because it was interested in understanding more clearly the state of staff development for teachers, in four different districts during the 1991–1992 academic year. To do that, we interviewed and surveyed a number of district staff, as well as administrators, principals, and teachers in each district, and had access to a variety of district documents. The four districts studied are urban school systems, facing the challenge of educating diverse student populations in a climate of fiscal restraint. While restructuring was not the explicit focus of the study, it became clear during the course of our research that it was an important issue in these districts and that it played out in very different ways.

Organizational change is the most typical and familiar kind of restructuring change in the educational reform literature. (See Tye, 1992; Florio, 1988; Murphy, 1991; Sashkin & Egermeier, 1991.) It involves changing administrative structures, either at the district level or at the school level, encompassing issues of both governance and operations. The premise behind organizational restructuring appears to be the recasting of traditional lines of power or authority within schools. It is referred to by many different terms,[2] including

- decentralization/centralization;
- site-based management/school-based management/participatory management; and
- participatory decision-making/shared decision-making.

Curricular change is the reform of any or all things curricular, in the name of school improvement. This kind of restructuring is generally built around the need to help students develop a richer understanding of subject matter and therefore emphasizes changes in teaching and learning practices. (See Elmore, 1992; Florio, 1988; Lieberman & Miller, 1990.) While rarely headlined as the major restructuring effort, curricular changes are often cited as having the greatest impact on students. These changes include

- reform of curriculum, in line with current national reform efforts and state frameworks;
- reform of instruction, especially regarding cooperative learning and heterogeneous grouping; and
- reform of assessment, away from standardized testing and toward a model of authentic assessment.

Fiscal change is the restructuring of school finances. This can be forced change, often due to shrinking revenues, or it can be strategic change, such as the reallocation of funds or access to new funding sources that contribute to fresh perspectives about school financing. Fiscal change is often the most public and visible kind of restructuring change. Examples within the four districts include

- budget shortfalls;
- downsizing; and
- matching district funds with external monies.

Relational change is the most implicit, the most understated, and potentially the most radical type of restructuring change. It involves restructuring the dynamics, or at least the expectations of relationships, among individuals in schools. While many definitions of restructuring are grounded in the imperative to change

the "roles, rules, and relationships between and among students and teachers, teachers and administrators, and administrators at various levels" (Sashkin & Egermeier, 1991, p.10), relational change is not frequently viewed as a primary focus for restructuring. Examples of relational change in these districts include

- team building/community building; and
- creating communities of learners.

These four kinds of restructuring change (organizational, curricular, fiscal, and relational), while not an exhaustive account of school reform activities, capture much of the restructuring work in the four school districts featured here. I use these four kinds of change as a template to organize each district's case study. While some districts focus more on one kind of change than another, examples of these changes can be found in each district. By describing the four types of restructuring, I document how each district is attempting to make substantive reforms in its school system, and is challenging, with greater or lesser success, the political status quo within schools and across the district.

The brief case studies of restructuring efforts in each of these four districts, organized around the four types of change, present an opportunity to look more closely at restructuring in action. The detail and length of these examples are limited by the original research agreement with the districts. Because they were assured confidentiality, pseudonyms are used, and each district is described only briefly to provide pertinent contextual information. Each of these districts is making a sincere effort to engage in restructuring and is raising difficult questions for itself about the nature of change. Confidentiality seems to help ensure that the activities might continue.

Midville

The Midville Public Schools comprise over fifty schools, with an enrollment of more than 25,000 students. The current superintendent was in his first year at the time of the study, although he had been with the district in other positions and had been involved in the development of a five-year strategic plan that guided district reform efforts. Consciously focusing on making changes in its schools, Midville is attempting a number of restructuring initiatives. Midville's case study is longer than the others because this diversity of efforts offers an opportunity to detail what different kinds of restructuring change look like.

Midville's five-year strategic plan lays out objectives for student achievement and suggests strategies for achieving those objectives including the restructuring of district resources. While the emphasis in the strategic plan is primarily on the kinds of *organizational changes* needed, principals and teachers in individual schools discussed the need for *relational changes* within the district as well. Teachers and district staff are struggling to find ways to implement *curricular changes* that will be in line with the strategic plan's mandate to improve student achievement. The backdrop for these restructuring efforts is ongoing *fiscal change*, in the form of budget cutbacks. As one district administrator noted, "Restructuring drives everything in the district." The question is whether the restructuring efforts in various areas are driving the district along similar paths.

The organizational change called for within this district is expressed in two key initiatives: decentralization and site-based management. In this district, decentralization means developing a plan to place the resources of the district, such as curriculum and instruction, student services, and business services, closer to the action of the schools. Some district staff see this decentralization plan as a fundamental reshaping of the district structure. Others interpret it less literally, and see the decentralization plan more as a statement of support for the schools by delegating more resources toward school-identified problems. While there is agreement about the intent of decentralization—that it will necessarily demand that district staff be more responsive to schools and less focused on initiating activities themselves—there seems to be no consensus about how to decentralize.

The district is also experimenting with a change in its administrative structure, by eliminating assistant superintendent positions and replacing them with lead principals. The creation of the lead principal positions is viewed as a statement by the district of its commitment to the

work of schools and to the building principals. The three lead principals are each responsible for one third of the district's schools. Their job, which is being created as they proceed, may involve tasks such as overseeing the academic programs of their schools, brokering district resources, and supporting staff development. The lead principal position seems, therefore, to be a way to break the district down into smaller clusters and to reestablish closer links between district administration and the activities of schools. Midville's decentralization efforts are generally focused on restructuring its administrative structure and changing in the ways in which district services are delivered. While most see these organizational changes as premised on a different kind of relationship between district staff and teachers, the nature of this relational change is less explicit.

A second feature of the organizational change undertaken in Midville is site-based management. A small number of schools in the district were selected during the 1990–1991 academic year (the year prior to the study) to develop site-based management and were given a small grant from the district to facilitate its implementation. The long-term goal of site-based management, from the district perspective, is for principals and their staffs to assume greater responsibility for "all areas of school operation, including curriculum, instruction, staff development, planning, budget, personnel, school climate, student life, and parent and community involvement." From the perspective of the involved schools, site-based management was seen primarily as an experiment in the development of a more participatory style of school management.

These differing interpretations of the meaning of site-based management are important to note. For the district, site-based management meant the promise of greater responsibility and accountability at the school level. For those in schools, site-based management was the opportunity to develop new lines of authority around decision-making. While both district and school were concerned with creating a new management approach, the different entry points into this task indicate their different perspectives.

In one Midville elementary school, site-based management meant a commitment to involving all members of the school in substantive decisions, and led to the entire faculty investigating the merits of a year-round school plan. In a middle school, which did not claim the district's label of site-based management but preferred to describe itself as engaging in "participatory management," the focus was on identifying the concerns of various stakeholders in the school and its community. In one high school, which referred to its work as "school-based management," a variety of teams were beginning to assume more decision-making responsibility for the functioning of the school. And, in another high school, restructuring took the form of a "teacher leader council" charged with school governance, including the development of a mission statement, and work teams for investigating various school issues.

The common thread among these approaches is that the buildings are taking on more initiative than in the past. How much initiative is taken, and how that authority is shared, depends on the make-up of the faculty and their principal.

These experiments in site-based management raisesome difficult issues for the district. One problem concerns the meaning of site-based management, since each school has a somewhat different understanding and orientation. Midville embarked on site-based management because it was seen as the kind of organizational change that could bring resources closer to the schools and enhance local accountability. It did not have an a priori model to offer schools, but encouraged them to experiment and create their own vision. Given the range of efforts that resulted, there is currently a moratorium on releasing more district funds to new sites until there is greater clarity about the model(s) for site-based management in Midville.

The second issue that has been raised in Midville is whether decentralization implies greater school autonomy. Some schools view restructuring as the opportunity to develop a greater degree of independence from the district. The district staff, on the other hand, tends to oppose

this view and sees decentralization as a shifting of resources to the schools, while maintaining a common set of goals and a more interdependent relationship with schools. The often implicit interpretations of decentralization, by schools and by the district, indicate that each has a different perspective and thus different expectations for school autonomy.

A third issue, then, concerns the reality of power sharing in the Midville Public Schools. Site-based management and decentralization initiatives intersect to challenge some basic power practices. Does organizational change within the district fundamentally reshape traditional lines of authority? Midville schools are experimenting with site-based management, often in the form of increased participatory decision-making structures that alter the nature of power within schools and lead to greater local ownership. Whether that ownership translates into greater independence from the district is of concern to Midville's district staff, who worry about the possibility of losing a common focus on district goals as the district decentralizes.

Moreover, there is some question about the extent to which the superintendent is willing and able to share authority with a reconfigured, decentralized district administration and with schools. And, at the school level, there is tension over whether site-based management means investing the principal with more authority or whether the power is shared among the school community. Embarking on site-based management and decentralization initiatives has raised, within the Midville schools, a Pandora's box of questions about the advisability, possibility, and ramifications of new kinds of power sharing.

In those Midville schools that believe that site-based management, in its various incarnations, means sharing power among the school community, there are less obvious, but nonetheless real, relational changes taking place. In the elementary school mentioned above, the staff's collective investigation of what a year-round schedule would mean for the school was instrumental in building community. The principal and teachers described the long series of discussions, the establishment of tasks and the delegation of work that marked their consideration of a new schedule and new priorities for their school. Tackling a difficult issue together, with a commitment to exploring for themselves the potential of the plan, helped the elementary faculty to draw together, among themselves and with their principal, and to reach out to the parent community. While not the articulated goal, this community building is seen by many school staff as their most notable achievement.

In the second high school I described earlier, the development of teams has been a major relational change within the school. The principal spoke of "stretching the limits" with teachers by forcing the issue of school ownership. Teams are charged with making re-structuring changes in the school, and have received some support in developing communication, problem solving, and consensus-building skills. Teachers report that the team format is exerting real authority in the school and is pulling groups together toward their shared goals. In this school, a sense of ownership is manifested in organizational changes, but the enthusiasm and efforts of teachers and principal are directed toward making the relational changes that will sustain real changes in their school structure.

In addition to organizational and relational changes, there are also curricular changes underway in the Midville schools. Within individual disciplines, teachers and district staff are engaged in various efforts to restructure the curriculum. These changes are an uneasy fit with organizational changes in the district. As Midville decentralizes, the role of the curriculum supervisor is called into question. In the past, curriculum supervisors had responsibility for the development and implementation of new curricula, whereas now their shrinking numbers are leading to the creation of a new role in which they act more as resources to teachers and principals: sharing emerging national standards frameworks; identifying materials, texts, and activities for teachers; and helping to orchestrate new professional development opportunities.

Partly in response to the new role for curriculum supervisors and partly in response to their own desire to shape curriculum in their schools, teachers and principals are called upon to take

a more active role in curriculum restructuring. They are increasingly expected to articulate their curricular needs, to describe the kinds of resources needed to make change in their schools, and to adapt those resources to their student populations. Such a shift in roles has forced the question about whether curriculum supervisors or teachers and principals felt prepared to take on new responsibilities and to develop new relationships between district and schools.

The changes underway in Midville, whether they are organizational, curricular, or relational, are occurring during a time of budget cutbacks. Therefore, there is little fiscal support for curriculum supervisors, teachers, and principals to create new roles before they are thrust into them. The district staff person most frequently cited as helping teachers and principals forge new relationships within site-based management schools has recently been cut, along with others in the staff development office. These fiscal changes demonstrate that restructuring in Midville is not only about enacting reform in line with the district's strategic plan; it is also about the reality of shrinking resources.

Riverton

The Riverton City Schools constitute a district larger than that in Midville. This system has over 150 schools serving more than 100,000 students. An interim superintendent was in place during the course of the study, with the new superintendent entering at the end of the 1991–1992 academic year. Beyond demographic and personnel differences, there are other issues that distinguish Riverton's restructuring initiatives from those in Midville. In Riverton, the *fiscal changes* brought about by cutbacks are more apparent, and the agenda for *organizational change* much less explicit. This district is searching for ways to restructure to better serve its student population, but is quickly realizing that the process is much more complicated than it had anticipated, in part because its restructuring work has not attended to *curricular* or *relational changes*.

Over the last ten years, Riverton has gradually cut back its district staff because of shrinking revenues. The district staff is seen as still trying to provide the same level of services, with fewer people. The result, from the perspective of many principals and teachers, is a loss of district focus as human resources are stretched too thinly. One principal characterized the district staff as "presenting what they know rather than what the system needs," in response to increased demands on their time. When schools request support in meeting one of the articulated systemwide goals, namely to work towards school-based management (Riverton's term), the district staff is generally unable to respond in the ways that schools need.

Many district staff believe that they could better help schools if they had more resources and greater centralization of those resources. This centralization, they argue, would allow them to make accessible to the schools a menu of district resources that is better coordinated and more integrated, in comparison to what is currently available. Given the fragmentation that now exists at the district level, this is quite possibly true. As noted by one administrator, awareness of and easier access to district resources would resolve the problem now faced by schools piloting school-based management. Currently, their success depends on their contacts in the district who can work the system for them. Given this reality, greater district centralization in Riverton is seen as the vehicle for providing better access to resources for all schools engaged in school-based management initiatives.

Among the small number of Riverton schools piloting school-based management, the emphasis is on shared decision-making, although in various forms. One administrator noted that by bringing in three different consultants to the school, the staff heard and tried to utilize three different approaches to decision-making within a school-based management framework. Rather than hearing these different approaches as a variety of avenues for developing shared decision-making, staff members are troubled by what they experience as often conflicting models for shared decison-making. They see the difficulty inherent in communicating their experiences with other schools: What do we all mean when we speak of shared decision-mak-

ing under school-based management? This diversity of perspectives on shared decision-making does not create options. Instead, it creates confusion.

As a former principal noted, "I thought I was doing site-based management [his term]" until he viewed what other school-based management schools are doing and saw the differences. These differences do not enhance the conversations across schools about organizational change. Instead, they seem to hinder cross-school communication and inhibit efforts to share information and resources by calling into question what each school is attempting.

Common to all these schools, however, is the sense that the process of school-based management is "much more complicated than turning over decision-making to the principal, parents, and teachers." In general, schools report that most of their energy goes to creating and sustaining a governance structure that includes teachers, parents, and other school stakeholders. This has meant confronting the very different agendas held by different constituencies. In one school, there was a stalemate over when to reschedule a school day missed because the heating equipment broke down. Parents advocated classes meeting on a Saturday; the teachers and principal wanted to add an hour to each of six class days to make up the time. Because the governing concil was committed to reaching full consensus, the decision could not be made. Rather than finding school-based management to be an empowering experience, these teachers, administrators, parents, and others often found it frustrating. The difficulties they faced in sharing responsibility for school governance decisions indicate the need for new kinds of relationships among groups not accustomed to working together.

While district staff, principals, and teachers spoke of their hopes that school-based management could lead to a transformation of leadership by teachers, it is clear that these remain only hopes. The relational changes needed are, in the words of one teacher, "transformations of the mind," so that teachers can begin to see themselves as valuable and contributing members of the decision-making team. Comparable "transformations" are needed by others involved in school-based management as well.

A stumbling block in Riverton's restructuring work, noted by many principals and teachers, is that the majority of teachers are reluctant to voice concerns and criticisms publicly, and appear unwilling to engage openly with others in their buildings and across the district. In public, teachers are more likely to go along with current restructuring efforts, and express their reservations only in private. This public compliance is, teachers explain, in response to their perception that the district does not view them as professionals, i.e., as individuals who can disagree with district policy, speak from their own classroom experiences, and have their ideas taken seriously. Lacking security about the district's trust in them as capable professionals, teachers are disinclined to be public about their experiences with restructuring.

District staff, in turn, often speak of the perceived apathy of teachers and the frustration that they feel when teachers seem disengaged from restructuring efforts. Some principals find themselves caught in the middle, trying on the one hand to engage teachers to speak openly and to take risks and, on the other hand, working to convince district staff that teachers are deserving of more trust and need more support to be able to act more effectively in participatory decision-making groups.

At the very least, Riverton's experiments in school-based management have demonstrated that the principal is a key figure. Half of the schools piloting school-based management experienced turnover in principals, with negative effects on the school community's ability to engage in some kind of participatory decision-making. The lack of stability among participants only supports the belief expressed by some in the district—teachers, principal, and administrative staff— that "this too shall pass." This attitude is indicative of the persistence of old relationships within schools and across the district. While it is clear that the current configuration of relationships in Riverton schools does not contribute to effective school-based management, it is less clear how to effect the necessary relational changes.

Eastown

Eastown Public Schools, while located in an urban area, is the smallest district studied, with 19 schools serving about 9,500 students. The current superintendent has been in place for the past few years and is largely responsible for the design of the district's core values, which inform the directions in which the district is moving. Eastown is notable for its stability in size and mission, particularly in comparison with Midville and Riverton, and this stability creates a different picture of restructuring. In fact, if asked, Eastown educators probably would not describe themselves as engaged in restructuring. Yet, the affirmation and extension of district decentralization and school autonomy, shaped by *fiscal changes* in Eastown, are characteristic of the kinds of *organizational changes* found in restructuring efforts in many other districts. And the work going on in Eastown around *curricular* and *relational changes* is part of a larger, national restructuring agenda.

Historically, Eastown has had many leaders. Principals enjoy much independence in determining the direction of programs and the organization of their schools. The recent district directive—that grade levels meet across buildings to gain better perspective on the district-wide curriculum—has met with protest from some teachers. Implementation of a district-wide program to develop respect for human differences, one of Eastown's core values, has encountered some resistance. Teachers and principals do not disagree with the intent of these initiatives; what they resist are the implied organizational changes suggested by these programs. An administrator noted that they "hate the 'm' word—mandatory." In a district where local school autonomy has been the order of the day, mandated district programs tend to be held at arm's length.

Yet, the superintendent characterizes his call for more coordination and contact across the district less as a request for centralization than as a desire to promote greater reflection and resource sharing in an already decentralized district. From the district perspective, the new programs do not indicate a change in organizational structure, but rather a realignment of the existing organization to meet the goals that the district espouses. Those at the school level, notably the principals and teachers, are more likely to see these reform efforts as fundamentally reshaping their traditional autonomy.

The de facto decentralization in the district is, most recently, the result of budget cutbacks. Staff and programs at the district level have been reduced, limiting the centralized resources available to schools. But these budget cutbacks have occurred in a district where teachers have historically played an active role in developing and implementing curricular change. Thus, fiscal changes have made more difficult, but not impossible, the work of restructuring the curriculum in terms of promoting practices such as cooperative learning and in responding to curricular reform efforts in mathematics, science, and language arts.

Part of what makes curricular change difficult in Eastown is the fact that there is, on the one hand, respect for the individual needs of diverse school communities and, on the other hand, a commitment to pass along an "acculturated" curriculum that supports district-wide values. The subject area curricula at many grade levels are largely created by teachers, with the help of district staff, and need to be passed along, by district staff, to teachers in other schools. This staff understands that its charge is to work with teachers in schools to maintain local visions, while fostering an overarching district perspective. The challenge is to do this in a way that creates meaningful curricular change.

One of the ways in which curricular change is sustained in Eastown is through teacher study groups in many of the schools. These study groups, which take on a range of issues depending on the interests of the teachers, grew out of an earlier district commitment to promote teacher networking and communication within schools. This emphasis on collegiality, seen in the study groups and articulated as one of the district's core values, has been a mechanism for teachers to share and develop their skills and knowledge in the classroom. It has resulted in relational change among teachers, who are now more likely to look upon their colleagues as interested in, capable of, and committed to reform activities in their school.

This is not to say that all is well and good in Eastown. Some teachers, principals, and district staff have noted that, while efforts such as study groups convey the value that the district places on collegiality, they are not a vehicle for institutional reform. Some within the district commented that Eastown sees itself as, perhaps, too willing to rest on its laurels, to remain satisfied with what those outside the district see as an enviable status quo. In Eastown, despite the active involvement of teachers in many forums, there are only a handful of schools in which there appears to be real power sharing between principal and teachers. With the scope of reform left largely up to individual buildings, there are remarkably few examples of substantive change. While some in the district believe that "if it ain't broke, don't fix it," others in Eastown suggest that there is a real need for restructuring on many fronts.

Seaview

The Seaview City Schools comprise the largest district studied, with over 150 schools serving almost 125,000 students. The superintendent has been with the district for a number of years and has been a guiding force behind the restructuring work that has taken place in Seaview over the past few years. Seaview has been involved in restructuring longer than the other three districts, and has perhaps the most ambitious and most clearly articulated restructuring agenda. It involves substantive *organizational change*, works toward *curricular change*, is premised on *relational change* and is occurring in a context of tremendous *fiscal change*.

The current downsizing of staff at the district level—down 30 percent over the past few years even as student enrollment has increased—is largely in response to decreasing education revenues. The challenge, with which the district openly struggles, is how to sustain the district's vision for restructuring within a difficult fiscal climate. Key to this effort is the clarity of the superintendent's vision, known to and supported by most teachers, principals, and district staff. While some may question the district's ability to succeed at restructuring, no one suggests that there is a lack of clear vision. The four central goals of the district are all cast as efforts to "restructure toward excellence" in areas such as teaching practices and learning outcomes, as well as governance and collaboration.

Recent budget cuts have, in a sense, forced Seaview's hand regarding efforts to decentralize. An administrative structure in place during the 1991–1992 academic year included four assistant superintendents who divided up responsibility for all the district's schools. This administrative structure was designed to create more manageable clusters of schools and to bring district resources closer to those schools. Reporting to the assistant superintendents were subject area team leaders as well as school team leaders. The latter were charged with facilitating schools' efforts to develop local governance plans and with brokering district resources in response to schools' articulated needs. Most people in the district saw the school team leaders as having a difficult role to play, caught between decreasing district resources and increasing school needs.

As a result of budget cuts preceding the 1992–1993 academic year, the school team leader positions were eliminated and the assistant superintendents, working with a handful of resource teachers in the schools, were asked to take up the brokering role. This action is seen across the district as an organizational change that is not in the best interest of Seaview's vision for restructuring. Rather, it is the attempt to accommodate unanticipated decreases in staffing, knowing that many of the remaining staff will be unable to bear the burden of those changes. Fiscal changes are threatening the district staff's efforts to assume a more responsive and less controlling stance toward schools.

The results of Seaview's fiscal changes are not limited to readjusting to diminished district resources. Budget cutbacks have also led to sustained efforts to extend shrinking district resources by accessing some new funding sources for restructuring initiatives, in the form of foundation support and designated state funds. Leveraging funds in this way carries some new implications for Seaview's restructuring efforts.

Receipt of particular state funds was contingent on local governance plans being in place in qualifying schools. To access these funds, Seaview required the creation of governance plans in all schools. Previously, governance plans were voluntary and had developed slowly in a number of schools, but with the district mandate, governance plans now became a high priority on the restructuring agenda. Much of the organizational change activity in schools became focused on creating a school governance plan, with varying levels of investment across the district. Some schools had substantive and important conversations about governance and developed shared decision-making models that reflected their schools' missions. Others put together perfunctory plans that eventually strained relations among some groups, trying to impose a level of trust that was not yet present. Many schools complained that their interest in restructuring was not for governance plans, but rather in restructuring efforts that would support better teaching and learning, goals they were forced to put on hold.

Local governance, intended to support greater school autonomy through shared decision-making, is accompanied in Seaview by greater school accountability for student outcomes. It is this concomitant accountability that troubles most principals and teachers. Since much of their time and energy has been put into developing workable governance arrangements for shared decision-making, many schools feel that they do not have the resources to make substantive changes in student outcomes.

However, in some Seaview schools, governance work has had the additional benefit of providing necessary articulation of school priorities. Many school faculties, for example, had to negotiate with the parents and community members on their governance councils about the number of student release days in the school schedule for teachers' professional development work. These negotiations often resulted both in a clearer statement of the value of professional development and in collaboration with community members on lobbying for more support from the district. Whereas some schools experienced governance work as distracting them from more pressing restructuring work, there are many accounts within the district of how the attention to local governance helped school communities better articulate their goals.

At the same time, these governance councils are in the process of learning for themselves what it means to take site responsibility for decision-making. They are, as one principal characterized them, "licensed drivers who have not yet gone through the driving lessons." Thus, while a district-sponsored survey reports that most teachers see in themselves the capacity for the kinds of change that restructuring demands, it is not always the case that the skills or the commitment to implement the district restructuring agenda are present. The quality and extent of teachers' commitment depends largely on the building principal's expressed resolve and on the skills that teachers and principals bring to the restructuring enterprise.

In schools where there is real commitment to restructuring work, where there is evidence of shared decision-making and where governance councils are taking action together, there are still other issues to address. Many subject area specialists on the district staff fear that greater school autonomy could lead to a kind of parochialism by schools, where curricular decisions are made primarily on an in-house perception of needs. Their concern is that tunnel vision, which would miss the larger perspective on district-wide curriculum reform goals, might result from site-based management. The challenge for district staff is both to respond to school needs and to help schools place their needs in a larger context.

Despite this challenge, there is evidence of curricular restructuring in Seaview schools. Curricula in many subject areas are being reconfigured to fit within state frameworks, to respond to national curriculum reform efforts, and to reflect current thinking about assessment. There is also evidence of assessment reform in a number of schools, visible largely through the schools' affiliations with national restructuring projects. This curricular restructuring work is challenged, however, because these changes are premised on new types of relationships between teachers and a reduced district staff, and among teachers and principals at the building level, relationships that are only beginning to evolve.

The district's vision and goals for restructuring emphasize the importance of collaboration and relationships within schools and across the district that are less hierarchical. There is evidence of this kind of relational change among teachers, who speak of the importance of collegial interaction as an avenue for restructuring. They work with colleagues on issues of school governance and curriculum reform, but these efforts are more ad hoc than not. While there is commitment at the district and school level to new kinds of relationships among teachers and others, there are still few institutionalized models for sustaining this kind of change.

Conclusion

Several conclusions emerge from this examination of restructuring in four school districts. The first is that there are many resources devoted to restructuring, in terms of time, energy, and money expended by teachers, administrators, and district staffs. This investment makes it especially important that there be some clarity as to the form and goals of school restructuring, so that districts can learn from one another and educators within districts can communicate effectively about their experiences.

A second conclusion is that there are many different agendas present when schools engage in reform. The efforts made by these districts to create organizational, curricular, fiscal, and/or relational changes reveal their particular reform intentions. The ways in which each of these four kinds of restructuring changes are manifested give each district its unique restructuring story. In order to understand a district's agenda and make sense of its reform efforts, it is important to distinguish among the kinds of changes attempted in the name of restructuring.

To recap briefly, we have seen that the most common restructuring initiative is the attempt to make *organizational changes* that revamp the district's interaction with schools and the operation of the schools themselves. The emphasis in these four districts on decentralization (or centralization) strategies and a variety of site-based management and decision-making models indicates that school restructuring often means transforming the structures around which schools and districts organize themselves. Restructuring is also undertaken through *curricular change*, when districts engage in reforming curriculum, instruction, or assessment. The curricular changes noted in these districts highlight the tension inherent in balancing local schools' needs with a district-wide educational vision. *Fiscal changes*, such as downsizing and budget cutbacks as well as stretching diminishing district resources by linking them with other funds, also lead to substantive changes in districts and schools. They are both the catalyst for and the result of reform efforts and, in these districts, are among the most visible changes associated with restructuring. *Relational change*, on the other hand, is probably the least visible and most challenging kind of restructuring initiative. As seen in these districts, it is often by changing the nature of relationships—among teachers, between teachers and administrators, among district and school staffs—that the possibility for genuine power sharing is created. Yet, despite the acknowledged need to create new relationships within districts, this kind of restructuring receives the least amount of attention and resources.

A third, and related, conclusion is that the long-term success of these district restructuring programs is limited because many of these changes are seen as separate initiatives. If restructuring is about sharing power in new ways, then it must be tackled on multiple fronts. Instead of confining a restructuring agenda to only organizational change or primarily curricular change, districts and schools must be supported in viewing restructuring as a systemic endeavor. As Fullan (in press) has noted, the history of educational reform in this country has underscored the complexity of creating real change in schools and the need to carry out comprehensive and multi-faceted reform strategies.

A fourth conclusion that I draw from these district case studies is that there is often only a tenuous connection between improving students' education—the expressed purpose of restructuring—and the restructuring efforts themselves. Endeavors to create school governance plans or to build more collaborative relationships among teachers and principals

become ends in themselves, without a clear vision of how these restructuring efforts will contribute to improving education. In order to sustain the hard work of restructuring, the people involved must have more than faith that their work will impact students; they must have a larger, shared vision of their work's potential effect.

The fifth and probably most far-reaching conclusion that can be drawn from this discussion of restructuring is that its success depends on educators' developing new skills, knowledge, and roles. Perhaps the clearest point of congruence among the restructuring efforts of these four districts is that they all presume, or at least hope, that principals, district staff, and especially teachers possess the level of skills in communication, problem solving, and consensus building necessary to reshape schools. In the name of restructuring, educators are called upon to build collaborative relationships, to develop perspectives that are broader than their individual classrooms or offices or departments, and to recast long-standing lines of authority and power within schools and across districts. These tasks are daunting, and it is vital that restructuring efforts actively support the development of the requisite skills and knowledge that will ensure the success of these new relationships and roles.

The work of restructuring schools and districts demands fundamental institutional and professional change, both in the vision of what schools can be and in the methods necessary to enact that vision. One district administrator spoke of the need for everyone in the system to have more "leadership training to release creativity. All we know to ask for," she said, "is more of what we already have." Restructuring calls for substantive changes in the status quo, but it is not a simple matter to see beyond the current configuration of schools and districts and to imagine fundamental change.

Thus, the greatest stumbling block to successful restructuring may not be commitment or enthusiasm or even desperate need. Perhaps educators within individual schools and across districts do not have the skills necessary for the large task of crafting and implementing new visions. Skills and knowledge are, or should be, the stock in trade of schools and are precisely what is needed to make restructuring work, yet they are often lacking. It would be a tremendous irony to say that current school restructuring efforts foundered because those involved were unable to access the resources that would allow them to learn the skills and develop the knowledge they needed.

Making the commitment to help educators develop the skills and knowledge they need would mark a real shift in the allocation of scarce resources in districts. Districts would be committing to investing resources in *people*— not as interchangeable parts that can be moved easily from one school to another or from one position to another, nor as functionaries whose job skills need to be updated periodically—but, rather, as intelligent, creative innovators, as professionals who, given the necessary support, have the capacity to reshape schools fundamentally. In a climate of shrinking school revenues, it is crucial to allocate scarce resources for restructuring where they will have the greatest impact, by investing them in the people charged with restructuring schools so that students will learn in powerful ways.

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Notes

[1] The Teacher Networks Group consists of the Urban Mathematics Collaboratives (UMC) and the Ford Foundation, the Collaboratives for Humanities and Arts Teaching (CHART) and the Rockefeller Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, National Science Foundation, Sherman Fairchild Foundation, Hitachi Foundation, and others. The research study commissioned by the Teacher Networks Group, entitled *Staff Development for Teachers: A Study of Configurations and Costs*, is supported with funds from the Carnegie Corporation, the National Science Foundation, CHART through the Rockefeller Foundation, and UMC through the Ford Foundation.

[2] The descriptive terms for each kind of restructuring change are drawn from the four districts featured in this paper. While these terms are also found within the educational reform literature, my intent here is to focus on the meanings ascribed to them in these districts.